

VZCZCXR05216
OO RUEHROV
DE RUEHTV #0245/01 0301823
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 301823Z JAN 08
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5212
INFO RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHXK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TEL AVIV 000245

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/30/2018

TAGS: PREL PGOV PINR MOPS IS LE

SUBJECT: WINOGRAD FINAL REPORT -- HARSHER ON IDF THAN ON OLMERT

REF: TEL AVIV 238

Classified By: Political Counselor Marc J. Sievers. Reason 1.4 (B/D)

¶11. (C) Jerusalem's first snowstorm of the season coincided with the public release of the Winograd report that has created a political storm of its own. How the media describe the findings of the report will determine, in large measure, the magnitude of that storm. Our initial assessment is that on a scale of 1 to 5 (light to harsh treatment), the grade PM Olmert received was a 2 while the Israeli military leadership fared significantly worse. Senior officers in the IDF reportedly told the Jerusalem Post that they had been preparing for a "worst case scenario" in which the military, not the political echelon would be blamed for most of the war's failures. This preliminary assessment will need to be reviewed once the report has been digested by the media, the Israeli public, and Defense Minister Ehud Barak, who will be the focus of intense scrutiny and speculation over the coming days. Key findings presented by Judge Winograd follow below.

Key Findings

¶12. (U) Judge Winograd emphasized in the course of his press conference January 30 that his Committee investigated the Second Lebanon War with a view toward drawing lessons for the future -- and hence refrained from including personal conclusions and recommendations in the final report. Winograd summarized the import of the interim report (of April 2007), stressing that Israel went to war without choosing a clear option for achieving its objectives and without an exit strategy: "these (lapses) constituted serious failures, which affected the whole war." The Committee produced a press release on its 600-plus page final report.

¶13. (U) Chief among the failures identified by the Committee were:

-- Overall, we regard the Second Lebanon War as a serious missed opportunity. Israel initiated a long war, which ended without its clear military victory. A semi-military organization of a few thousand men resisted, for a few weeks, the strongest army in the Middle East...

-- After a long period of using only standoff fire power and limited ground activities, Israel initiated a large scale ground offensive, very close to the Security Council resolution imposing a ceasefire. This offensive did not result in military gains and was not completed.

-- There were serious failings and shortcomings in the decision-making processes and staff-work in the political and military echelons and their interface.

-- There were serious failings and flaws in the quality of preparedness, decision-making and performance in the IDF high command, especially in the Army.

-- There were serious failings and flaws in the lack of strategic thinking and planning, in both the political and military echelons.

-- There were severe failings and flaws in the defense of the civilian population and in coping with its being attacked by rockets.

-- These weaknesses resulted in part from inadequacies of preparedness and strategic and operative planning which go back long before the Second Lebanon war.

¶4. (U) In addition, Winograd highlighted:

-- "Israel did not use its military force well and effectively, despite the fact that it was a limited war initiated by Israel itself."

-- "At the end of the day, Israel did not gain a political achievement because of military successes; rather, it relied on a political agreement, which included positive elements for Israel, which permitted it to stop a war which it had failed to win."

-- "The IDF... failed to provide the political echelon with a military achievement that could have served as a basis for political and diplomatic action."

-- "There were those in the IDF high command, joined by some in the political echelon, who entertained a baseless hope

TEL AVIV 00000245 002 OF 003

that the capabilities of the Air Force could prove decisive in the war."

-- UNSCR 1701 constituted a "significant diplomatic achievement." "The staff work in the MFA concerning the adoption of a favorable resolution in the Security Council was, in the main, quick, systematic and efficient... but did not reflect clear awareness of the essential need to maintain an effective relationship between military achievements and diplomatic activities."

¶5. (U) On decision-making related to the final ground offensive -- an issue of intense public interest due to the relatively heavy IDF losses and charges that the Prime Minister approved it to score political points, Winograd found ambiguity and determined that it was "impossible to evaluate the ground operation at the end of the war without recalling the developments that preceded it and the repeated delays in the adoption of the Security Council resolution." Thus, Winograd assessed:

-- "It is not clear what the ground operation contributed to speeding up the diplomatic achievement or improving it. It is also unclear to what extent starting the ground offensive affected the reactions of the Government of Lebanon and Hizballah to the ceasefire."

and concluded that:

-- "The decision to start the ground operation was within the political and professional discretion of its makers, on the basis of the facts before them. The goals of the ground operation were legitimate, and were not exhausted by the wish to hasten or improve a diplomatic achievement. There was no failure in that decision in itself, despite its limited achievements and its painful costs."

-- Both the prime minister and minister of defense "acted out of a strong and sincere perception of what they thought at the time was Israel's interest."

Eyes on the Two Ehuds:

¶6. (C) PM Ehud Olmert and his allies, notably Haim Ramon, have invested a great deal of time pulsing the political elite and pundits in the past few days, stressing the positive results of his leadership since the Second Lebanon War (reftel). With selective leaks and open access, Olmert has won over key supporters in the Yediot Ahronot newspaper and Channel 2, the most widely read and watched media outlets, but faces hostility from writers and reporters in other outlets, such as Maariv and Channel 10. He has countered possible calls for his resignation or early elections with arguments about the cost such decisions would have for the nation, including bringing a halt to the Annapolis process. On January 30, Olmert received the report an hour in advance of the public, and his team worked quickly to get their spin to the public. In particular, they have highlighted the report's assessment that the decision to launch a ground operation in the final three days of the 34-day war was reasonable in the framework of diplomatic and military considerations that faced the decision-makers at the time. (See para 5 above.)

¶7. (C) DefMin Ehud Barak has cleared his calendar for the next 48 hours to provide time to fully digest the report before reacting to it. All eyes are on him, and our contacts assess that he will be under enormous pressure to react publicly and clearly. Given the tenor of Winograd's presentation of the final report, it appears to us that Barak will have leeway to find a rationale to remain in the government. Only if a political tempest brews quickly and with great intensity will Barak keep his campaign commitment to call for early elections in late 2008 or 2009, which, given Olmert's adamant stance that such a call would immediately render him a lameduck, would amount to a major coalition crisis. In fact, Olmert told one Barak associate that should Barak demand early elections in the wake of Winograd, Olmert himself will act to dissolve the government and hold early elections in 90 days, a move that would be lose-lose for Olmert and Barak. We anticipate a measured reaction from Barak over the course of the next four days.

Visit Embassy Tel Aviv's Classified Website:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/telaviv>

You can also access this site through the State Department's

TEL AVIV 00000245 003 OF 003

Classified SIPRNET website.

MORENO